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ABSTRACT

As in the past, education has no choice but to put its best foot forward. There is tremendous competition for the community's attention, sympathy, and funds, and if education is to get its fair share of all of these, the public must be made aware of the schools' vitally important contributions to the nation's future. A forceful student council can assume an influential role in this process of community enlightenment. An honest, forthright, aggressive student council public relations program might well serve to correct any distortion that may exist in the community's view of student activities. The authors of this booklet urge all council advisors and members to follow suggested routes to better public relations. The booklet is written in a manner deliberately calculated to be of practical value in helping the student council face its distinctive public relations difficulties. (Author/PC)

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Public Relations for Student Councils

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New Directions for Student Councils
NUMBER THIRTEEN

Public Relations for Student Councils

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THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS
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Foreword

Today, education has no choice but to put its best foot forward. There is tremendous competition for the community's attention, sympathy, and funds, and if education is to get its fair share of all of these, the public must be made aware of the schools' vitally important contributions to the nation's future.

Said another way, the public must be shown beyond the shadow of a doubt that by generously supporting education, it is getting its money's worth.

A forceful student council can assume an influential role in this process of community enlightenment. This is particularly true today, when the news media are focusing so much on the disruptive, negative aspects of student life. An honest, forthright, aggressive student council public relations program might well serve to correct any distortion that may exist in the community's view of student activities.

In addition, a well-organized council public relations program will pay extraordinary dividends in student body support for council activities. The council, after all, can rally this support only if the students fully understand what the council is doing.

We therefore urge all council advisers and members to heed the advice contained in this booklet, the thirteenth of the NASC's New Directions for Student Councils series, and we commend its author, Robert Dexter, for his fine work in producing it.

OWEN B. KIERNAN
Secretary
National Association of Student Councils
Executive Secretary
National Association of Secondary School Principals

Preface

The author has made two assumptions in preparing this manuscript. They are:

- The principal of the school has the legal authority and the prime responsibility for the operation of the entire school program.
- The school should be a better place in which to learn as a result of student council activity.

Every idea and suggestion has been evaluated in terms of its compatibility with these two assumptions.

This is not intended to be a definitive treatment of public relations. More erudite and comprehensive treatments of this subject are available in quantity. This booklet is written in a manner deliberately calculated to be of practical value in helping the student council face its distinctive public relations difficulties.

RGD
February, 1970

Public Relations for Student Councils

Setting the Stage

WHETHER you realize it or not, your student council already has a public relations program. And your various publics—that is, the students in your school, your teachers, administrators, businessmen in your community, elected officials, civic association leaders, and other groups and people—all have opinions about what student councils are and what they stand for.

It is the sum total of these opinions—whether they be good or bad—that indicates the success or failure of the public relations program of your student council.

How your council attempts to work with these publics to encourage support for your organization is, in effect, your public relations program.

UNDERSTANDING THE LANGUAGE

Like doctors and other professional groups, public relations and communications people have their own jargon. The following are some of the most commonly used terms that the student involved in PR work should know in order to be able to operate effectively:

• *Publics*—These are the groups of people that the student council deals with and that it must influence. They can be divided, for our purposes, into two groups: internal publics and external publics. The students in your school, teachers and administrators, club presidents, members of the representative council, and the cafeteria and custodial staffs are all examples of the *internal publics* of the student council. The *external publics* consist of groups

outside of the school. The town council and the elected city officers, religious officials, the police department, store owners, newspapermen, radio and television personnel are part of the external publics of the student council. The list is limitless.

(As an exercise, see if you can write down the five most important publics outside of the school—important, that is, in terms of their impact on public opinion.)

- *Internal Public Relations*—PR activities within the school.
- *External Public Relations*—What the student council does outside of the school to influence public opinion and to seek support for the organization.
- *Media*—The mass communications industry: newspapers, radio stations, and television outlets.
- *News release*—A prepared statement by the organization for use by the media or by other groups. It contains information of general interest about the organization.
- *Publicity*—A general term used to describe all activities undertaken to spread the word about an organization's work or program. Publicity could take the form of a news release, a radio program, or an event planned specifically to call attention to a project or program.

At one time, the terms "public relations" and "publicity" were synonymous. This view has changed to the point where now publicity is merely one of the tools of public relations. It is the effectively planned use of the *many* tools of PR in a logical manner to achieve a predetermined goal that is the hallmark of a modern PR program and that has given rise to the widespread use of PR by the giant industrial complexes of our day.

To illustrate, the student council might use all of the following public relations techniques or tools: an address at a civic organization meeting by the president of the student council; a news release; a radio program featuring student leaders; a special issue of the school newspaper; and a tea for teachers. Although it is obvious that each of these PR tools is different, it is equally obvious that the same council PR goal could be promoted at each of these events.

In short, it is the skillful coordination of the many PR

techniques that spells the difference between a haphazard and probably ineffectual approach to promoting your ideas or activities and an effective public relations program.

Getting Organized

Every student council should have a special public relations committee whose function it is to analyze problems faced by the council and to advise the executive committee of the council on the public relations potential of the courses of action open to it.

Ideally, the chairman of the public relations committee serves as a voting member of the council's executive committee and is an active participant in all policy decisions that affect the council's image and relations with its various publics.

If the student council public relations program is going to amount to anything, however, those who have responsibility for the program must be able to offer their advice *at the time the decisions are made*, not after the fact. It is folly for a council to appoint a committee that is meant to be advisory and then proceed to execute a program without taking advantage of their knowledge. Advisory means what it says.

By necessity, the public relations committee would be responsible not only for analyzing the public relations potential of various programs and projects but also for taking direct action to improve the image of the council.

While specific training for membership on this committee would not be essential (after all, student councils are a leadership training ground), it is easy to understand that skills in communications and human relations would be an asset.

A Word of Caution

The student council should resist taking on problems thrust upon it by school officials because of their difficulty. For example, one of the more perplexing problems facing school administrators is that of student smoking. It would always be appropriate for the student council to cooperate with the

administration in helping to find a solution to this problem, but the council should not take on the full responsibility for the solution, particularly if it is evident that the administrators have been unable to solve the problem themselves.

Student participation in activities and projects sponsored by organizations outside of the school, such as speech contests, scholarship competitions and the like, should be encouraged by the council and the administration. However, extreme caution should be exercised in the selection of *approved* outside activities. In this connection, the National Association of Secondary School Principals publishes yearly an approved list of national contests and activities. Single copies of this booklet are available, free of charge, from NASSP, 1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Public Relations for Student Councils

Internal Public Relations

At a recent luncheon meeting attended by several high school students, one of the boys was asked, "How's the student council operating in your school?" He replied, "Well, I don't know. I just don't know much about that group." "Who is the president?" he was asked. Again the answer was, "I don't know."

This student ignorance of council affairs is not at all uncommon. Obviously, the internal public relations program of the student council in that particular school left a lot to be desired. The answers of the student did more than just indicate a serious communications problem; they also pointed up a weakness present in many student councils: that often the council representatives and/or the executive committeemen have lost touch with the people they are supposed to represent.

The student council that is represented by the "elite" members of the student body and represents the point of view of only a small minority of students is doomed to failure, and its public relations will reflect this.

Students—The Council's Most Important Public

No student council can be effective without the cooperation, understanding, and support of its most important public—the students. Without a solid foundation of support from this public, it is senseless to tackle problems involving other publics.

The question is: How can the student council win this support? Communications and involvement provide the answer.

In most schools the student council has meetings of the

homeroom representatives, the executive committee, and the faculty adviser on a regular basis, with many of the meetings designed to inform. Many times these meetings are ineffective because the information flow is only one way, from the top down. This is, however, only one of internal public relations problems facing the student council. A graver problem lies in the homeroom representative's lack of understanding of his role as a communicator and as a public relations agent for the council.

The Leadership Training Institute

The Leadership Training Institute, LTI for short, is an institution that can do much to invigorate a sagging student council—and its PR program. The leadership workshop idea is not new; many state student council associations (and the National Association of Student Councils) have extensive programs every summer, some of them lasting several days. This practice should be carried on at the local level as well.

Local LTIS should be held early in the school year, preferably on a Saturday or some other holiday. (When possible, it would be desirable to establish that a willingness to attend such a workshop is one of the prerequisites for holding council office.) At the LTI, the representative would have his role as a two-way communicator explained. In addition, he would learn how to go about actually developing the skills of a communicator.

To establish communication between the council and the student body (and this is the key to an effective PR program), the homeroom representatives will have to master such basic skills as how to give an interesting report, how to conduct a meeting, how to elicit opinions, and how to achieve a consensus on important issues. He will have to know how to avoid getting bogged down in parliamentary procedure and when to keep quiet and let others talk.

What we are talking about is the development by the representative of skills in group dynamics and human relations. A

person who cannot develop them cannot be an effective communicator, and therefore should not be a council representative.

Newsletter A Must

One of the cornerstones of a good internal public relations program is the council newsletter, which reports the highlights of the council's meetings. The purpose of this publication would be to show that the council is a democratic body and that a two-way flow of information does exist, that the student does have a say about council actions.

This newsletter need not be fancy. It should explain *briefly* the actions taken by the council and the suggestions made by the homeroom representatives. It ought to be produced in enough quantity so that there are about ten copies for each homeroom. If possible, it should be mimeographed or xeroxed, not dittoed, and be color-coded, so that successive issues are printed on different colored paper. It ought to be prepared the same day as the meeting or, at the very latest, be available for distribution to the homeroom representatives the morning after the meeting. Many organizations have found it advisable to use standard-sized notebook paper cut in half vertically for the short newsletter or memo. Incidentally, the masthead (the design at the top of the newsletter) should be expertly done, as nothing gives a worse impression than seeing a second-class job; if it's worth doing, it's worth doing right.

The production of a council newsletter will consume time and money, but both the time and the money will be well spent if the job is done conscientiously.

A Final Consideration

The homeroom representative is going to need more than human relations skills to help him do his job. He will need support. The newsletter and posters explaining student council accomplishments will help, of course, as will the leadership workshop. But in the last analysis, it will be exciting and worthwhile programs—programs responsive to the needs of the students—that will be the most important support the

council can give. Organizations that are where the action is receive positive responses from their constituents.

If a person believes that he is part of an activity, has a say in the planning and execution of the activity, he becomes, as the late Kimball Wiles, a noted authority on schools, said, "a co-sponsor." He will then become a "co-advocate," because he won't want to be part of a failing venture. When he reaches this stage he will work to "sell" the student council and its projects not only within the confines of the school, but also outside the school, and this means his parents, who are paying the bill for the entire educative process.

If the student council leadership cannot win the active support of the student body for its program, it might just as well close up shop.

School Administrators—Your Second Most Important Public

The principal is the person legally responsible for the school program. He cannot, by law, delegate this authority to you, your student council, or anyone else. If mistakes are made, he must bear the brunt of the criticism. Former President Harry S. Truman said, "The buck stops here," when referring to the presidency. The principal has the same kind of responsibility, only on a smaller scale.

Because of the principal's authority, the student council's relationships with his administration are crucial. There is no room here for haphazardness. The relationship must be planned and continuous so that the principal at all times is kept abreast of the activities of the student council.

Councils should not view this relationship with alarm. The progressive administrator in the modern secondary school will probably look upon the council as co-curricular rather than extracurricular. This means that he will consider council activity to be an integral part of the school program, an activity that ought to function during the school day on school time. If the administrators in your school do not subscribe to this

belief, it would behoove the council to make the acceptance of this philosophy a long range goal.

The weekly meeting between the principal, the student council adviser, and council officials (usually the president, at least) is the best way to keep the administration informed of the activities of the council. These meetings should be informal and ought to be held on school time. The thoughtful council president will prepare for the principal, prior to the meeting, a short memo in which are listed the points for discussion. This will give the busy principal a handy reference in recalling what happened at the meeting.

This two-way communication will go far towards avoiding the misunderstandings that occasionally result in forcing the principal to use his veto power.

But there will be times, of course, when the student council wants to do something that the administration thinks is just not feasible. In these cases, a lucid, forceful, and well-thought-out plan will help to make the principal's veto unnecessary. Council leaders must remember that the principal has been appointed to his job because he has a good deal of experience in the operation of the educational enterprise, and act accordingly.

The Faculty—The Third Most Important Public

One busy day while engaged in a rather lively discussion with his class, a teacher was rudely interrupted by the following statement from his student council homeroom representative: "Mr. _____," he said, "I'm going to the student council meeting right now." The teacher's first reaction was not surprising. He said, "Oh, no, you're not!"

Here was a simple, uncomplicated example of poor internal public relations. Of course, student councils are important, but those students involved in out-of-class activities must realize that absence from class is a major irritation to most teachers and thus becomes a roadblock to effective student council functioning.

When a student is absent from class the work must be made up, tests must be retaken and restructured, assignments repeated, etc. And to be perfectly honest, every teacher usually feels that his or her subject is the most important subject in the curriculum.

How much better it would have been if the homeroom representative had spoken to the teacher several days in advance of the meeting and presented the proposition in this manner:

1. There is going to be an important meeting of the student council on Wednesday at 1:30 p.m. and all council members have been asked to be present.

2. I would appreciate the opportunity to present a report of the meeting to the class, perhaps on Thursday morning. I think the report and the discussion will last about twenty minutes.

3. If I make up the work that I will miss because of the meeting, would it be possible for me to attend?

This kind of an approach to the teacher is designed with public relations in mind and often meets with success. Even if school policy states that student council members should be released from class for council meetings, the suggested approach is still a good idea.

If the teacher who is asked to grant the request for the absence from class is present for the follow-up report, the representative has a golden opportunity to show that the time spent away from class was worthwhile. If teachers can be convinced of this point, and if they come to believe that the school is a better place to learn as a result of council work, then the council's status will be that much more secure, and its work will be eased greatly.

Just because you are convinced that the council is a worthwhile and successful organization, it does not necessarily follow that this opinion is shared by your teachers. But as the members of the council continually strive—through their consideration and their activities—to emphasize its place in the school, they will find faculty support growing. Patience and the understanding of others' problems are the keys to success in the council's dealings with the faculty.

Other Internal Publics

The support personnel in the school are often affected by the activities of the student council. Dances, special events, and Saturday meetings require the aid of custodial and cafeteria personnel. The council should treat these people with the same respect that they accord anyone who helps and cooperates to make a project or activity a success.

Again, the council should plan, as with other groups, a two-way communications program so that these important people will not be "down" on the organization because of the extra work that they have to do to accommodate the council's program.

Public Relations for Student Councils

External Public Relations

IN THESE days of unrest, national emergency, and protest, it is not hard to understand why the public displays negative attitudes. Newspapers, television, and much of our modern literature tend to emphasize the violent aspect of our society and to stress the sensational. Small wonder, then, that people are usually more receptive to criticism about an organization than to praise about it. Often one item of negative criticism will offset a whole series of accomplishments. The report of a "rumble" after a school dance in the Sunday paper, for example, will nullify the good effects of a program that has taken months to plan and implement. This is why the community-relations function of the student council is so critical.

It is mandatory that the external public relations program of the student council be carried out with the full knowledge and assent of the students, the faculty, and, most important, the school's administration. The council's PR program must dovetail with that of the entire school system, as working at cross-purposes will negate much of a school's PR achievements.

All too few school systems have employed public relations or public information specialists on their staffs, even though this is one of the fastest growing responsibilities of school administration. In those systems that do employ such a specialist, the student council's PR program must be coordinated through this person to insure unity in the total program.

In many cases, even though there is no person in the system specified to handle PR problems full-time, the council members will find that a teacher or an administrator will have a part-

time responsibility in this area. The same advice applies: check with him before embarking on a PR program.

Community Relations PR Goals

The primary goal of the council's external public relations program should be to inform the public about council work in such a way that the public will think more highly of the school system and the students.

This is not a selfish goal. The public is paying the bill for the schools and has a right to be informed about what is happening to its investment. If the public is convinced that its investment is paying dividends, it is going to be more willing to continue its support for the schools. Hopefully, it will be even willing to increase this support.

Opinions differ on the matter of student involvement in school bond election campaigns, even though this involvement is a tangible indication that the students support the schools and the school program.

The Tools of the Trade

There is a variety of tools and techniques available for use by the council in disseminating the "good word" to the public. There ought to be no such thing as a "one shot" external public relations program. If public relations is to have any lasting value, the program must be continuous and extensive.

The News Release

The news release is perhaps the most commonly used method of carrying information to the public. Almost every student council has access to a local newspaper and it is comparatively simple for councils to build up a good working relationship with the press if the newspaper editors have confidence in the reliability of the council's information. Credibility and dependability, then, are the factors that determine success with newspapers.

Some student councils have organized arrangements with weekly newspapers. The relationship usually includes an agree-

ment by the council that a committee of students will be responsible for a weekly feature on some student activity presently in progress in the school. Many of these arrangements go sour when the students bite off more than they can chew; preparing a weekly news article is not a simple task and requires many willing workers. When the newspaper people realize that their deadlines are not going to be met and that the students are not producing the stories as agreed upon, they cancel the whole project. This damages the school's press relations.

Generally speaking, newspapers, both weekly and daily, will use student council copy (the newspaper word for stories). They will also use glossy photographs that accompany the news releases. A word of caution: don't write on the backs of the photographs; tape a piece of paper on the bottom of the picture with a description of what the picture is about and the names (make sure you spell them correctly) of the persons in the picture.

Above all, *don't complain if your story or picture is not used by the paper*. Just keep sending the paper more stories and photographs. Sooner or later your copy will appear in print.

Preparing Newspaper Copy

The basic rule in the journalism profession is to be accurate on all the facts, small as well as big. Also of basic importance is your ability to conform to accepted newspaper style. This would include the use of the "inverted pyramid" in your arrangement of facts.

The "inverted pyramid" style of newspaper writing places the most important facts in the "lead" (the first paragraph) with additional facts or explanations following in order of diminishing importance. Editors fit copy to the space available after the advertisements have been drawn in for each page, and most of the time stories are trimmed from the bottom up to fill a certain number of column inches.

The use of the "inverted pyramid" style will answer the following questions in the first paragraph or two: *Who* said it or did it; *what* was said or done; *when* it occurred; *how* it

happened; *where* it took place; and, if pertinent, *why* it happened. These are just some pointers. Information written for the press should be typewritten. Remember to keep a copy for your files.

Some Do's and Don'ts for Better Newspaper Stories

DO

- Type your story on one side of the paper only; use standard 8½" x 11" paper; double space the typing.
- Leave the top third of the first page blank, except for the source information.
- Source information should be at the top right corner of the first page and should include:
  a. The full name and address of your organization
  b. The writer's name and title with the organization
  c. A telephone number and home address where the writer may be reached, if necessary.
- End each page with a complete sentence; preferably make the sentence the end of a paragraph.
- Keep the story short. But if a second page is necessary always indicate "MORE" at the bottom of the first page.
- Use the following mark to indicate the end of the story: —30—
- Leave generous margins around all sides of each page.
- Consider the deadlines of the daily and weekly papers. Be sure they get the story as far in advance as possible.
- Send your news to the reporter or editor who will handle the story.
- Completely identify every person mentioned in the story.
- Skip the adjectives. Give the facts.
- Use short words, short sentences, short paragraphs.
- Know your subject. Get the story right the first time.
- Make absolutely certain that all names are spelled correctly.

DON'T

- Don't use all caps anywhere in the story except for titles of publications.
- Don't underline certain phrases in the story.
- Don't send carbon copies, especially fuzzy copies on onion skin paper.

- Don't send "dirty" copy that has been cluttered with strike-outs and alterations.
- Don't send your story to an advertising or circulation man. Send it to the right editorial employee of the paper.
- Don't ask the editor to send you clippings or tear sheets.
- Don't ask for the return of a photograph, unless it is one specifically requested by the editor.
- Don't use highly technical or "arty" language.
- Don't try to get too much in one story. If you have several subjects, break them down into separate news stories.
- Don't call an editor to find out when and if he is going to use your story.
- Don't try to pass off something as an exclusive if it isn't.
- Don't tell the editor that his readers will be interested in your story. If it's news, he will know better than you.
- Don't quote out of context unless you are certain the meaning of the sentence has not been altered.
- Don't ask to check on proofs on a story.
- Don't try to disguise advertising as news.
- Don't try to pressure an editor.
- Don't color the facts. Leave out the superlatives, exaggerated claims, self-promotion, opinions, or personal commentary.
- Don't complain to the editor if your story is not used. Send him a better one next time!

Radio and Television

Contrary to popular opinion, radio and television stations are under no obligation to grant public service air time to any *specific* group. The Federal Communications Commission does, however, urge the stations to devote a portion of their air time to items of public interest.

Student participation in radio and television public service programming is on the upswing. The public is keenly aware of the importance of student opinion, especially since the many recent student uprisings. Because of the timeliness of the "student unrest" topic, your council's ideas for public service air time stand an excellent chance of success.

Before you decide to approach a radio or TV station with an idea for a spot announcement, discussion show, a series of

programs, or what-have-you, these two points should be kept in mind; radio and TV directors and producers are very busy people; ideas for programs are plentiful, but practical, workable ideas for programs are few.

Air time, unlike newspaper space, is not expandable. There are only so many hours in a day available. Your ideas for programs will have to compete with the ideas from many other groups for what is always a limited amount of public service air time.

If the council in your school is considering using radio and/or television in the external PR program, a useful publication you can obtain is, "If You Want Air Time." It is an 18-page booklet available at no charge from the National Association of Broadcasters, 1771 N Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Organizing a Speakers' Bureau

The organization of a speakers' bureau will afford the council an opportunity to make direct contact with the public. The size of the bureau will depend on local conditions. However, it is better to have a small group of active speakers who are able and willing to present the material in an objective and intelligent manner than to have a large group that is unwieldy and whose members may be unprepared and unreliable.

The use of a speakers' bureau brings with it a bonus: every audience contains potential promoters for the schools and for the council. These promoters, if inspired and adequately informed by the speaker, might go out into the community and "talk up" school projects, including those of the student council.

The council must recognize at the outset that the operation of a bureau is a big responsibility. It involves recruiting and scheduling of speakers, making arrangements for literature and publicity, and maintaining close liaison between the speakers and those to whom they are to speak.

An intensive phone and mail campaign might be conducted to give the widest possible publicity to the speakers. Each person who makes a publicity call ought to have an outline of

the highlights of each speech offered; this will assure a consistency in the appeals for support.

Each speaker should have a brief, basic outline for his presentation, in addition to answers to anticipated questions. In one community, the student council president prepared colored slides to illustrate the activities of the council. Other visual aids such as films, graphs, and charts might be introduced to add emphasis.

A brief biography of the speaker should be provided for the convenience of the group before whom the speaker is appearing.

Listed below are easy steps to follow in setting up the speakers' bureau:

- Decide upon the bureau's goals.
- Develop programs on a variety of topics. (Topics *need not* always be school related.) Employ use of audiovisual aids, if available.
- Offer programs to civic groups, reaching them through personal contact, phone calls, letters. Offer service free of charge.
- Distribute speakers' bureau pamphlets containing services available, program topics, contact information, time required to schedule events.
- Prepare the forms needed: request slips—confirmation slips—speaker confirmation slips—reminder slips.
- Follow up by use of letter or mimeographed correspondence on unanswered questions or related points of interest.

A word to the wise: This proposed student council activity should be cleared with the principal of the school before the bureau gets past the planning stages. Also, it is far better not to get involved in an activity of this nature unless the council has students who are exceptionally well qualified for this sort of job. A poor speaker is *not* better than no speaker at all.

Billboard Advertising

Your student council might consider the use of billboards for promoting a particular project or program or just for goodwill

purposes. The student councils in Salisbury, Maryland, for example, have for several years contracted for a prominent billboard which is on the main highway entering the city. It says "Welcome to Salisbury" and includes the student council tagline at the bottom. This is good public relations.

The standard size for billboards is the so-called 24-sheet poster which can be purchased from the outdoor advertising corporations. Councils interested in this kind of activity should contact this local agency to see if it will donate the space and the posting charge. In the past, the outdoor advertising companies have donated the space but will sometimes charge for the paste-up fee. A thorough investigation, particularly on costs, by the council, is in order before embarking on this venture.

Electronic Telephone Answering Device

The following information concerns a telephone-answering device which is available on a rental basis from the telephone company. The company installs and services the machine, and although the cost varies, it is usually quite reasonable.

This is how it works. The organization renting the machine records a message on the machine's tape recorder. When a special telephone number issued by the company and distributed by the organization is called, the taped message is automatically played into the telephone. If the caller wishes more information, he may leave his telephone number when the message is over. These requests and telephone numbers can be played back to the organization at a convenient time. An automatic record is kept of the number of calls that have been answered by the machine.

The advantages of this device are obvious. An organization can reach a great many people ordinarily not reached by its activities. By voice inflections on the tape, the speaker can emphasize needed information and the message is delivered without loss of personal time. Also, it is a more personal way of contacting persons than by printed flyers. And, finally, the message will be delivered regardless of the time, day or night.

In the Community

Community activities taken on by the students, as individuals or as part of the student council's PR program, will help to enhance the image of the school. Many high school girls assist in hospitals as Candy Stripers, boys often participate in local civic association recreation activities for the underprivileged, and often high school clubs will assist in approved fund-raising activities.

An alert public that sees its high school students involved in worthwhile community activities will certainly think more highly of the institution they represent. This type of involvement should be encouraged by the council.

Public Relations for Student Councils

A Case Study

THE school year had just begun and the student council was holding its first general meeting, with all the homeroom representatives and the executive committee present. Following a welcome by the president and a few short remarks by the faculty adviser and the principal (who had been invited previously to welcome the group), the floor was opened to questions. The suggestion was offered that the student council take the prime responsibility for planning the year's public relations campaign for American Education Week. The suggestion was adopted.*

GETTING STARTED

After getting the approval for the project, the president immediately referred the idea to the public relations committee, which had been established the preceding year after a council-sponsored community event fell flat.

The PR committee met the next day. The council president sat in so that he would have the benefit of the committee's thinking when he explained the plan for action to the principal at the regular meeting of the two later in the week.

The committee first determined the goals and purposes of American Education Week (AEW). Most of the committeemen knew that it was an annual event, usually held in November, which encouraged school visitations by parents; but other

* For a list of student council projects, see chapter IX, "Student Council Projects," in *The Student Council Handbook*, published in 1967 by the National Association of Student Councils.

than that, their understanding of the week's purposes were rather vague.

A quick trip to the library produced the following official definition: "AEW was inaugurated in 1921 to call public attention to the importance of education in a democracy and to remind every citizen that good schools, are, to a very large degree, his personal responsibility."

The committee realized very quickly that the basic goal of AEW was to generate more public support for the public schools. With this in mind, two committees were formed: one for internal and one for external public relations activities.

A two-pronged publicity campaign was planned and approved by the faculty adviser and the principal. The plans and the budget were approved by the council. A small co-ordinating committee was set up, made up of several members of the internal and external committees, and an overall general chairman was appointed.

Internal PR Plans for AEW

An assembly was planned for two weeks prior to AEW; an inspirational speaker was invited to address the student body for 15 or 20 minutes. At the assembly, after the address, the council president proclaimed AEW as "Bring a Parent to School Week." He stressed the importance of the Week to the school and the community. He also announced that suggestion boxes would be put in every homeroom so that students could offer their ideas concerning the best way or ways to maximize participation by the public.

Spreading the Word

On the day following the assembly, posters were delivered to every classroom announcing the theme and a schedule of events during AEW that might be of interest to the parents. The schedule included special programs for parents, one for each day of the observance. The plan had been approved by the principal, with the agreement of the faculty. Earlier, the

council president and the AEW general chairman had appeared at a faculty meeting to announce the campaign plans and to ask the faculty for their aid. Suggestions for improving the plan were solicited from the principal and the faculty.

The next phase involved calling a special meeting of all the school's club presidents. The general chairman asked for their cooperation and they agreed to assist the project by preparing displays highlighting the activities of the groups they represented. It was agreed that these displays were to be completed on the Wednesday before AEW and that each club president would report to the general chairman when his display was finished.

The general chairman met with the editor of the school newspaper well in advance of AEW. Together they planned a special issue of the newspaper, which would be produced in sufficient quantity for distribution to the students and to the parents when they arrived at the school. One of this issue's features was to be a proclamation concerning AEW, signed by the Mayor and the members of the City Council.

To generate student interest, the council announced a contest to determine which homeroom could bring in the highest number of adult visitors during the week. Free tickets to the next school dance were offered as the prize.

Other In-School Activities

At a meeting of the student council the general chairman announced that a small group of students would be assigned to welcome parents when they arrived for their AEW visits. These "greeters" would show them where to hang their coats, ask them to sign the register, explain to them the special programs planned for them, and generally make them feel at home. Arrangements had also been made with the cafeteria personnel to have coffee and donuts available for the visitors.

On the Friday before AEW, each student was asked to take home a carefully prepared flyer signed by the local superintendent of schools encouraging the parents to visit the schools during AEW. The council president and the AEW general

chairman had earlier discussed this letter at a special meeting with the superintendent, during which the superintendent was briefed on the council's plans for AEW. He said he would encourage the board of education members to visit the school at least once during AEW. The superintendent also agreed to furnish a publication explaining the aims and the philosophy of the district's schools; this would be distributed to visiting parents.

A special committee of students was appointed to work with the faculty to insure ample parking for the visitors. The faculty members agreed to leave ample parking space near the entrances to the school. In addition, the school newspaper was asked to request student cooperation in this matter of allowing enough visitors' parking space during AEW.

The Countdown

The council president arranged with the principal for an extended homeroom period on the Friday before AEW. Each homeroom representative was briefed on all the plans for the observance and was instructed to use this extended homeroom period to explain in detail what was to happen during AEW.

External PR Activities

As the AEW external PR committee had a very limited budget, it decided to limit its requests for publicity assistance to person-to-person contacts. This meant that pairs of students would visit specific publics to ask for help in making AEW a success. Before each visit the committee decided what kind of assistance it would ask for.

Radio and TV Contacts

The students who visited the radio stations had called previously for an appointment. When they arrived they presented the station's public service director with a fact sheet that told the "who, what, where, when, why, and how" of AEW. They

also had with them a series of 10- and 20-second spot announcements. These spot announcements were effective because they encouraged the listener to "do" something, namely, visit the schools during AEW. The students also asked if there was a possibility for a special program (or programs) during AEW that would feature student leaders. Because this station scheduled several "talk" shows the students suggested a program on student unrest and gave the public service director the names of five students who would excel in a program on this subject.

On the same day the students visited the TV station and had a conference with its public service director. Different 10- and 20-second spot announcements had been written for TV and the students also brought along with them a slide which could be used while the announcer read the copy. Through the local teachers association, the students obtained two one-minute color television spots produced by the National Education Association (NEA) which encouraged parents to check up on their investment during AEW. The students also asked if there was any possibility for a special program or a special feature on AEW that could be incorporated into the existing program schedule of the TV station.

Newspaper Contacts

Several weeks before AEW, two students visited the editor of the newspaper with ideas for a photo-story that might be used in a special AEW supplement. Because of the complexity of the task of preparing such a supplement and the economics of the matter, the students suggested that, if the editor wished, they would ask the public information director for the school system to call him and make readily available the information needed for the supplement.

As the council had already gotten the proclamation from the Mayor, the students asked the editor if he would care to publish it. They explained to him, so that there would be no misunderstanding, that the school newspaper would also print the proclamation.

The Speakers' Bureau

Approximately one month before AEW, the speakers' bureau sent out a flyer to all civic and service organizations in the community indicating that the student council was sponsoring the AEW observance and that student speakers from the bureau would be available during the week to present a special talk on student activities. The flyer asked these organizations to assist the school by publicizing the "visit your schools" message prior to the actual AEW observance. A self-addressed, stamped post card was included in the mailing for the organizations' presidents to sign and send back. A follow-up campaign was conducted by telephone to contact those who did not respond to the flyer.

Other Activities

The outdoor advertising agency was contacted and billboard space obtained at cost. The message on the billboard read: "Visit Your Schools During American Education Week." The dates of the event were included in the message.

Local businessmen received several posters for display in their windows. Although these posters were not done by professionals, they had the professional look.

The Parent-Teacher-Student Association was deeply involved in the AEW plans. The November meeting of the PTSA was planned to coincide with AEW and for this meeting the students planned a forum of student panelists discussing the problems facing the school and the community.

Materials for the event were supplied through the courtesy of the local teachers association, which purchased placemats, posters, and other publicity materials from the NEA for use in the school during AEW.

SUMMARY

Planning for a special school event that has important public relations overtones is a serious and time-consuming business. Generally speaking, it is not the major events that cause trouble; it is, rather, the details that usually slow things. For example,

a student-sponsored function that included as guests the local superintendent of schools, the school's principal, the Mayor of the town, and the members of the Board of Education drew an extremely large attendance. When the time came for introductions, the master of ceremonies, a student, mispronounced several of the guests' names, forgot to introduce their wives, and completely neglected to introduce the superintendent of schools. This major blunder ruined what was otherwise a very worthwhile affair.

In the imaginary case study just presented, it should be noted that extensive plans were made in advance of the event, deadlines were set, and follow-ups were scheduled. Throughout the entire planning procedure the committees selected specific PR tools for use in dealing with each public. For example, the committee did not suggest that paid advertising should be used to encourage student support for the observance. Nevertheless, newspaper advertising might very well be a useful tool in encouraging the parents to visit the school.

It is highly unlikely that many student councils would take on the responsibility for so complete a program as the one detailed here. This is perhaps as it should be, as a student council should never take on more than it can reasonably expect to accomplish. Whatever the council plans to do, it must do well.

Public Relations for Student Councils

Points to Remember

WHILE it is true that many student councils occasionally use some of the tools of public relations, it is seldom the case that a well-conceived, thoroughly organized, and efficiently executed public relations program is an integral part of the council's ongoing program. Public relations is most often an afterthought.

There is growing evidence throughout the United States that the rising costs of education are causing some alarm among the public, and that this is reflected in the lessened amount of support that the public is willing to extend to the schools. Voters in growing numbers are turning down school construction bonds and saying "no" to increases in school tax levies.

A perplexed public that votes "no" on the issue of better schools is really saying that it doesn't think it is getting its money's worth. Perhaps in some cases this is true. However, many experts insist that in many cases it is not really that the citizen isn't getting his money's worth, but that he *thinks* that he is being short-changed.

The implications for public relations are evident. The job of school public relations is to interpret the educational enterprise to the public. The school PR function is growing in importance as leaders of educational institutions realize that a well-informed public is more apt to support the instrument that it has created with its own tax money.

Lest we get an outdated view of public relations, it should be pointed out that to understand fully the role of PR one should not assume that PR means only telling what is good, and eliminating or hiding what is bad. This "head in the sand" approach will just not work. PR is "telling it like it is." This

does not mean that the good points can't be emphasized. It does mean that forthright answers must be given to embarrassing questions.

Student councils can no longer afford the luxury of a hit-or-miss public relations program, especially when the publics outside the school are so quick to criticize the system. The student council can do much to add to the positive image of the school as an institution.

Those having uninformed opinions about their schools must be re-educated and student councils have an obligation through the use of public relations programs to participate in this re-education.